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ABSTRACT

This document contains a brief bibliography of peer-reviewed literature, with abstracts, on pets and the elderly. It is one of 12 bibliographies on aging prepared by the National Agricultural Library for its "Pathfinders" series of publications. Topics covered by the other 11 bibliographies include aging parents, adult children, dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the elderly (written for educators), dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the elderly (written for consumers), family caregiving, family support networks, grandparenting, humor in later life, intergenerational relationships, living arrangements in later life, and sibling relationships in adulthood. This bibliography on pets and the elderly contains citations for 24 books and articles for researchers and educators. One professional journal, "Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal on the Interactions of People, Animals and Environment," is also cited. It concludes with a list of organizations that readers may contact for further assistance. (NB)

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PETS AND THE ELDERLY

PREPARED BY BILLIE H. FRAZIER, Ph.D., CFLE**

This PATHFINDER has been prepared to assist researchers and educators better understand the relationship between companion animals, people and health.

RESEARCHER/EDUCATOR

Animals, Aging, and the Aged, Leo K. Bustad. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.

According to this eminent author, animal studies have played a major role in helping explore the mechanisms underlying the diseases prevalent in the later years. Animal investigations have provided insight into physiological changes with age. In this book, the author discusses another way in which animals can help older persons--as companions for the elderly. Chapter 1 provides a perspective on animals and the ways they have assisted mankind from earliest recorded history. Chapter 2 presents information about what happens to animals as they age and the extent to which changes in animals resemble what happens to people as a result of the aging process. Chapter 3 focuses on knowledge gained from animal studies that can assist old persons and those who provide for the health and well-being of the elderly. In Chapter 4, the author explores the role of companion animals in contributing to the physical and psychological well-being of our aging population. The author's view of the critical issues and needs are summarized in the Afterword.

This PATHFINDER lists significant resources that are judged to be accurate, readable and available. Opinions expressed in the publication do not reflect views of the United States Department of Agriculture.

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"Companion Animals and Elderly People: A Challenge for Evaluators of Social Support," Susanne S. Robb and Charles E. Stegman. The Gerontologist, 23(3):277-282, June 1983.

It is not known if the psychological, social, or physical health of people improves because they associate with companion animals. This comparative study measured selected health-related effects of companion-animals on humans. The sample consisted of elderly veterans who did and did not live with pets. No significant differences were observed. Researchers seeking to document the benefits of pets on humans have a number of exploratory/descriptive studies to conduct before more controlled investigations can be justified. Sufficient benefits must still be demonstrated before legislative changes, which allow pets in certain settings, are made.

"Companion Animals and the Elderly," Carole E. Fudin. Veterinary Technician. 8(1):34-48, January/February 1987.

The authors provide information on characteristics of the elderly, physical changes in old age, emotions in old age, and what companion animals mean to the elderly. It is suggested that pets enhance physical well-being, meet many psychological needs, and help satisfy many social needs. The reasons for an older person to obtain a pet are listed. Guiding pet selection for the elderly and recommendations for working with elderly clients are presented.

"Companion Animals and the Elderly: A State-of-the-Art Summary," Cindy C. Wilson and F. Ellen Netting. Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, 183(12):1425-1429, December 15, 1983.

The human/animal relationship exhibited by the elderly and their pets has limitations as well as potentials. The functions of a pet as a companion and social facilitator in pet-facilitated psychotherapy include: serving as a cotherapist for facilitation of rapport; providing companionship; substituting for close interpersonal relationships; enhancing the health status of a variety of target groups; increasing opportunity for sensory stimulation; and providing emotional support and a sense of well-being. Available information was limited because few studies have been replicated, data were not validated, and previous studies were restricted mainly to institutionalized or therapeutic environments. Implications for future research include the use of animals for companionship and the promotion of physical, social, and emotional health of the elderly.

"Demographics of Pet Ownership Among U.S. Elderly," Martin B. Marx, Lorann Stallones, and Thomas F. Garrity. Anthrozoos, 1(1), Summer 1987.

A national telephone survey of U.S. elderly, aged 65 and over, provides a comparison of the demographic characteristics of pet owners and non-pet-owners residing in households from 45 states and the District of Columbia. The survey found that those least likely to own pets were single, less educated, of medium socioeconomic status and resided in the northeast and north central United States. Race and income per se were not a factor.

Dynamic Relationships in Practice: Animals in the Helping Professions. Phil Arkow (ed.). Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation, 1984.

This book contains sections on: the human/animal bond and understanding both sides of the bond, programs in action; perspectives; program implementation; and references. Of special interest to gerontologists is Chapter 16: The Nursing Home and the Bond which includes pet policies, animal visitation regulations, and program guidelines.

"Effects of Pet and/or People Visits on Nursing Home Residents," Helen M. Hendy. The International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 25(4):279-292, 1987.

A previous study by the author supported the recently popularized idea that live pet-visits increase desirable behaviors such as smiling and alertness in nursing home residents. It also suggested that people-visits may be even more effective. The present study compared the effects of different visiting programs (people-alone, people-plus-pets, pets-alone and no visit) on the behaviors of nursing home residents (proximity, talking, smiling, ambulation, alertness). All three visiting programs of people-alone, people-plus-pets, and pets-alone increased the behaviors of smiling and alertness in comparison to the control group condition in the nursing home lounge. Close proximity to the person-alone visitor was, however, associated with the greatest number of positive resident behaviors. Future research is suggested to examine the characteristics that make effective pet and person visits for nursing home residents.

"The Elderly's Adjustment to the Loss of a Companion Animal: People-Pet Dependency," Cyrus S. Stewart, John C. Thrush, George S. Paulus and Patrick Hafner. In: Death Studies, 9:383-393, 1985.

The attachment process and the resultant caregiving behaviors are crucial components of an individual's feelings of self-worth. Loss of valued relations and support may adversely affect a person's psychological well-being. When such loss is experienced during the later years of life, the reorientation of attachment needs may become focused on a pet as a source and object of caring. Consequently, the loss of a pet can produce grief and mourning, which are intensified by the lack of supportive networks. The findings of this study reveal that the people-pet bond has a positive influence on attachment needs. The active social lives of the sample do not mitigate the significance that pets play in the elderly's attachment system. The absence of mourning rituals for the death of pets raises significant questions for the professional as to the most appropriate way to help the bereaved deal with the stress produced by the loss of a companion animal.

"Favorable Attitudes Toward Pets and Happiness Among the Elderly," Cathleen M. Connell and Daniel J. Lago. In: The Pet Connection: Its Influence on Our Health and Quality of Life, Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart (eds.). Minneapolis, MI: The University of Minnesota, 1984.

The study was conducted to determine the effects of pets on the well-being of a sample of community-dwelling elderly. Results indicate that a favorable attitude toward pets contributed more to the perceived happiness of elderly pet owners than several other commonly documented predictors, including a measure of social satisfaction and of the activities of daily living. The direction and magnitude of this effect depends on marital status. Caution should be exercised when attempting to predict the well-being of the elderly, because vast differences emerged between various subgroups of the study. The unique characteristics of the individuals involved need to be taken into account.

Human-Animal Interactions: Historic and Professional Patterns, David C. Anderson. Delta Society Conference, Orlando, FL: September 29-October 1, 1988.

This bibliographic analysis was conducted to assess the historic patterns of research on human-animal interactions and to identify the professions which have contributed research. A list of journal articles was created by searching several databases and by supplementing it with references from several special issues of journals. Data were summarized for each professional research field by year and by journal, permitting an evaluation of the accessibility of each profession's contribution. Veterinary medicine, psychology and nursing were those professions showing strong growth in coverage. The most prolific and still currently published journals are the following: Aging, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, California Veterinarian, Compendium on Continuing Education for the Practicing Veterinarian, The Gerontologist, Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Journal of Gerontological Nursing, Marriage and Family Review, Psychological Reports, Public Health Reports, and Veterinary Clinics of North America.

"The Mascot Model of Human/Companion Animal Interaction: Its Effects on Levels of Loneliness and Depression Among Residents of a Nursing Home," Mark Edward Reed. Dissertation Abstracts International, 47:12-B, Part 1, 5065-B, 1986.

The author analyzed the impact of a mascot model of pet therapy on levels of loneliness and depression among nursing home residents. One implication of the study is that proper pet selection and staff support are essential to the success of any pet therapy project. Empirical support is provided for developing mascot model pet therapy programs in nursing homes where residents' depression and loneliness are a major concern.

"A New Look at Pet-Facilitated Therapy," Alan M. Beck and Aaron Honori Katcher. Journal of the American Veterinary Association, 184(4):414-421, February 15, 1984.

The authors conclude that there is adequate documentation that pets can evoke positive feelings and enthusiasm from some withdrawn, apathetic, and depressed patients. This provides ample justification for the continuation of planned growth of recreational pet visitation programs. However, evidence about the health effects of pet ownership are contradictory. It has been shown that pets can reduce stress under experimental conditions, and there are some subject groups that may experience health benefits from animal ownership. However, there are other populations on which pet ownership may be associated with a decrease in health and morale. The evidence that pets may improve health is strong enough to merit continued investigation. The investigation should focus on the value of the bond between people and pets rather than the presence of animals per se.

NIH Technology Assessment Workshop - Health Benefits of Pets: Summary of Working Group, Robert K. Anderson, Alan M. Beck, Susan M. Clark, Peter G. Kaufmann, Marcia G. Ory, Andrew N. Rowan, Stephen J. Suomi, and Thomas L. Wolfe. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, September 10-11, 1987.

The Working Group believes it is important to generate an increased awareness of the potential importance of human-animal interaction and involve scientists from a wide variety of fields for interdisciplinary collaborative research. This workshop examined many relationships between companion animals, people, and health, and concentrated on the status of the scientific descriptions of these relationships. The Working Group believes that persuasive evidence was presented to conclude that pets are likely to be medically beneficial to some people's health. However, much is to be learned about the relationships before broad generalizations of medical benefit can be made. The committee hopes that investigators will heed the recommendations of this report in the design of future studies.

The Pet Connection: Its Influence on Our Health and Quality of Life, Robert K. Anderson, Benjamin L. Hart and Lynette A. Hart. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1984.

The authors include sections on the human-animal bond; its origins, history and background; relationships of the human-animal bond to human development; use of animals to enhance human functioning; and the relationships of pets to family life style and personality factors. Discussions of the effects of the human-animal bond on individuals, in society, and on long term care are also included.

"Pet-Facilitated Therapies: A Review of the Literature and Clinical Implementation Considerations," Clark M. Brickel. Clinical Gerontologist, 5(3/4):309-332, 1986.

The author's comprehensive review describes the range and benefits (physical and psychological) of pet-facilitated therapy, anecdotal and empirical data, and a comparison of therapist-facilitated versus therapist-absent human-pet interactions. Flexibility and practicality in offering hints to practitioners is recommended.

"Pet Ownership: Another Research Note," M. Powell Lawton, Miriam Moss, and Elizabeth Moles. The Gerontologist, 24(2):208-210, April 1984.

Data from a national sample of older people indicate that pet ownership was more frequent in owner-occupied residences in smaller communities where other family, including children, were present. No association between pet ownership and psychological well-being or health was found. However, the author feels that for some people, a pet can be an extremely salient aspect of life.

"Pet Possession and Life Satisfaction in Elderly Women," Marcia G. Ory and Evelyn L. Goldberg. In: New Perspectives on Our Lives With Companion Animals. Aaron Honori Katcher and Alan M. Beck, (eds.), pp 307-317. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

The basic rationale for examining the importance of pets is that companion animals offer a constant and unquestioning source of social contact and serve as a catalyst for social interaction. In this study, there was no relationship between the presence of pets in the household and reported happiness. There was a relationship between the qualitative aspects of pet ownership and happiness. Attached pet owners are not different from non-owners, but women who report being unattached to their pets are the most likely to be unhappy. The relationship between pet ownership and happiness is dependent on socioeconomic status (SES). Among those with high SES, pet ownership is associated with greater happiness. Among those of lower SES, however, pet ownership is associated with unhappiness. The authors speculated that the meaning of pet ownership is different for different segments of the population. There is also some evidence that pet interactions vary by racial groups.

Pets and Mental Health, Odean Cusack. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1988.

The author explores recent research and findings on the use of pets in mental health therapy. The historical basis of using pets in therapy is reviewed. Numerous examples show the astonishing results of prescribing pets to disabled, lonely, incarcerated, and institutionalized persons. The author provides evidence of the therapeutic value that animals have in making people happier, healthier and more sociable.

Pets and the Elderly: The Therapeutic Bond, Odean Cusack and Elaine Smith. New York, NY: The Haworth Press, 1984.

The origin of animal-facilitated therapy can be traced to the 18th century when animals were part of the living environment, and patients were encouraged to learn to care for them. There is a growing recognition of the human/animal bond in the scientific and academic community. This book includes chapters on the human/animal bond, implementing animal therapy in the institution, program suggestions, pet visitation programs, therapy dogs in action, and non-canine therapists. Organizations involved in pet therapy and current legislation are included in the appendix.

Pets and the Family, Marvin B. Sussman. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1985.

This major book explores the interactions between pets and their owners and the social and emotional benefits that may be derived by families who have pets. The author sums up state-of-the-art research and findings to provide animal lovers, family health professionals, and researchers with amazing insights in the complexities of family/pet interactions.

"Pets as Partners of Seniors: An Ideal Role for Cats," Lynette A. Hart and Benjamin L. Hart. In: Companion Animal Practice, 2(1):33-January 1988.

The authors discuss the role of cats as a social bridge with neighbors, affection, constant companionship, and an opportunity to provide responsible care for another individual. Due to the reclusive and depressed lifestyle of many apartment dwellers, the veterinary profession is encouraged to nurture the trend of apartments eliminating regulations prohibiting pets.

"Pets or People: Another Research Note," John Goldmeier. The Gerontologist, 26(2):203-206, April 1986.

Four groups of elderly women who lived alone were compared. Some lived with a companion pet, while others lived without one. Pets made a difference only for those women who lived alone. At best, pets attenuated the sense of loneliness that the women may have felt from the lack of human companionship. In intervention programs with the elderly, the provision of human supports should remain a priority.

"A Review of the Roles of Pet Animals in Psychotherapy and with the Elderly," Clark M. Brickel. International Journal of Aging and Human Development 12(2):119-128, 1980-1981.

A survey of case histories, anecdotal evidence, and pilot studies shows that, as therapeutic adjuncts, pet animals facilitate rapport and otherwise enrich the treatment milieu. Similar evidence shows that pets enhance the lives of their owners in the community. Pet-facilitated psychotherapy can increase social interaction, provide comfort and support, and reinforce feelings of independence. Replication and expansion of existing studies are recommended to further explore how pet animals may enrich the lives of members of psychiatric and geriatric populations.

The Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice. Symposium On The Human-Companion Animal Bond, Jamie Quackenbush and Victoria L. Voith" (eds.). Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders Company, 15(2), 1985.

The authors include discussions on attachment of people to companion animals, the evolution of domestic pets and companion animals, and cultural attitudes toward pets. Chapters include: people-pet programs that work; pets and the elderly; riding and the handicapped; and the therapeutic use of animals. The death of a pet and how it can affect owners and the role of animals in stress reduction are also included.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL

ANTHROZOOS: A Multidisciplinary Journal on the Interactions of People, Animals and Environment. Boston, MA: University Press of New England.

Anthrozoos is a new, wide-ranging multidisciplinary journal dedicated to exploring the nature of interaction between humans, animals, and the environment. By presenting research in this area within a single source, Anthrozoos brings together findings that previously have been inaccessible or scattered among many publications. Edited by a board of internationally recognized scholars and veterinary specialists, Anthrozoos provides a unique focus for a rapidly growing and essential field of study. It is published quarterly for the Delta Society.

C O N T A C T F O R A S S I S T A N C E

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This PATHFINDER resulted from the author's research at the National Agricultural Library while on sabbatical leave from the University of Maryland during the summer and fall of 1989. Using database searches of AGRICOLA, Psycinfo, Social Scisearch, ERIC, Family Resources, Dissertation Abstracts International, and Ageline, relevant references were reviewed and annotated. It is authored by:

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